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ABSTRACT

This report contains summaries of case studies of five literacy projects for women conducted under the auspices of Wider Opportunities for Women's Female Single Parent Literacy Project. The programs described in the case studies are the following: (1) Non-Traditional Employment for Women, New York City; (2) Access for Women: Expanding Options for Teen Mothers, Brooklyn; (3) Midwest Women's Center: Women's Apprenticeship and Nontraditional Training, Chicago; (4) the STEP (Strategies to Elevate People) Foundation: Mary Crowley Academy, Dallas; and (5) Wider Opportunities for Women, Inc., Washington, D.C. Each summary provides information on the community, the site, the literacy program (clientele, program principles, strategies and techniques, support services, staffing, funding, and program results), and plans/recommendations for the future. In addition, an executive summary delineates the common threads that run through the five case studies: internal barriers to women's success, and external barriers to women's progress (instability; inaccessible, inappropriate services; lack of support services; and inadequate goal setting) that have been addressed by the programs described. (KC)

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WIDER OPPORTUNITIES: COMBINING LITERACY AND EMPLOYMENT TRAINING FOR WOMEN

Executive Summary of the Female Single Parent Literacy Project Case Studies

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Wider Opportunities for Women, Inc.
1325 G Street, N.W. (LL) Washington, DC 20005

Wider Opportunities: Combining Literacy and Employment Training for Women

Executive Summary of the Female Single Parent Literacy Project Case Studies

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1325 G Street, N.W. (LL) Washington, DC 20005

Funded by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation

ABOUT WIDER OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN, INC.

Wider Opportunities for Women (WOW) works nationally and in its home community of Washington, DC to achieve economic independence and equality of opportunity for women and girls. For more than 20 years, WOW has been at the forefront of women's employment issues.

What began as a local Washington effort to help women help themselves has become a multi-faceted women's employment organization, recognized nationally for its model skills training and job placement programs for women. While it continues to provide training services locally, WOW also leads a national network of nearly 400 independent women's employment programs and advocates in 48 states. Each year, WOW's network serves more than a quarter of a million women seeking employment information, counseling, training, and jobs. With its unique perspective as a job trainer and policy monitor, WOW is a respected advocate for the needs and rights of women workers.

ABOUT THE FEMALE SINGLE PARENT LITERACY PROJECT

With support from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, WOW has undertaken an 18-month, national project to improve the literacy skills of women who head families. The project incorporates a series of activities which includes:

- research and publication of five case studies of community-based literacy programs that serve low-income women;
- the creation of a National Task Force on Female Literacy through the National Coalition for Women and Girls in Education to monitor and analyze public and private initiatives to improve literacy;
- the design and dissemination of a model literacy skills program within an employment and training setting; and
- the development of a public education campaign to build greater awareness of the steps necessary to increase the literacy of single mothers and their children.

The five case study sites were chosen through a national survey of WOW's Women's Work Force Network members and extensive outreach to the employment/training and women's advocacy community. The eventual selection was based on an initial assessment of longevity of service delivery, funding stability, staffing capability, and success rate of the literacy component of the program.

THE CASE STUDY SITES

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Betsy Andrews, *Case Study Researcher*

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Wider Opportunities for Women, Inc.

WIDER OPPORTUNITIES:

Combining Literacy and Employment Training for Women

Executive Summary

A low-income, single mother who wants to improve her basic skills faces a complex web of barriers that inhibits her efforts to participate in literacy programs. The barrier cited most frequently is the difficulty of finding accessible, affordable child care, but finances, housing, health, transportation, family problems, and social pressures can all become major obstacles.

In addition, women struggle with psychological barriers such as low self-esteem and fear of failure. Impatience with the slow pace of daily progress is another stumbling block. Many trainees feel strong pressure for an immediate source of income. Living on the edge financially, they are reluctant to make long-range plans.

Literacy providers themselves often inadvertently place barriers in the path of potential participants by scheduling classes at night, for example, when child care is more difficult to arrange, or by meeting in public school buildings, which low-income women may associate with past failures. Teaching students with a wide range of skill levels together in one class can also create barriers to progress, as the slower students may feel embarrassed, while the others become bored or frustrated.

The five literacy programs covered in the case studies of the WOW project have developed philosophies, strategies, and support services focused on the needs of low-income, single mothers. Following is a summary of the barriers as seen

from the perspective of these programs and the strategies described in the case studies for helping to remove those barriers.

INTERNAL BARRIERS

Before a woman seeks child care or financial help on the way to literacy program enrollment, she has to face unhappy memories of past failures in school. All the case studies cite low self-esteem, particularly in relation to classroom learning, as a pervasive problem among low-income, single mothers. The Midwest Women's Center (MWC) in Chicago reports that its literacy program participants have an average of 11 years of failure in the classroom. The emotional legacy from a personal history of failure can prevent a woman from contacting a literacy program or impede her progress if she does enroll.

Women struggle with psychological barriers such as low self-esteem and fear of failure.

Consequently, each program has incorporated strategies into its curriculum to improve participants' self-image. One of the principles of the MWC program, for example, is to give each applicant a sense of accomplishment just from entering and completing the program; no one is turned away due to low skill levels. Instructors in the Non-Traditional Employment for Women (NEW) Program in New York City help build confidence by emphasizing that students possess keen survival skills and a wealth of existing knowledge. The programs use learning materials relevant to the students' lives, emphasizing that they already know a lot about the world.

Constant encouragement in a nonthreatening atmosphere is a regular feature of these programs. The Mary Crowley Academy (MCA) in Dallas creates a Family Share Team for each student, which functions like an extended family, providing support, concern, and help with problem solving.

Providing role models is another strategy for building a positive self-image. The literacy instructor at Access for Women in Brooklyn uses card games that incorporate lessons about notable women of color.

A problem related to low self-esteem is the guilt that single mothers experience about taking time from their families to devote to self-improvement. Many hold the view that such plans should wait until their children are raised or at least in school.

To help overcome this barrier, literacy instructors stress short-term goals that relate to the family, such as improving skills in order to help children with homework. Trainees frequently comment that literacy program participation has enhanced their image in the eyes of their children.

Learning problems constitute a barrier generally requiring individual instruction or tutoring. Wider Opportunities for Women (WOW) considers its Individualized Education Prescription (IEP) to be the most essential strategy of its remediation efforts. An IEP is developed for each student, identifying her particular barriers to successful learning and documenting the instructional approaches used to overcome them. Several of the programs use volunteer tutors to provide one-on-one assistance as a strategy for surmounting this obstacle.

2 Illiteracy in itself can be a monumental barrier, as the WOW case study pointed

out, since the women may be unable to read or understand letters or flyers promoting literacy programs or be intimidated by the prospect of filling out application forms.

The evaluators of the literacy program at Access for Women revealed a hidden barrier in the form of students' denial that barriers even exist. In discussion groups and on questionnaires, past and present students initially said that only a lack of desire to succeed or a reluctance to work could stand in the way of successful completion of the literacy program. Upon further questioning, however, they acknowledged self-doubt, financial or family problems, and the inadequacy of child care, especially for sick children.

The evaluators' implicit recommendation for overcoming this barrier is to encourage open, free-wheeling discussion of trainees' problems in the program. In addition, the programs all use the strategy of one-on-one counseling to work out individual problems.

Access program participants also cited conflicts with classmates whose lack of commitment caused friction and lowered morale in the classroom. Instructors recommended that the screening process be improved so that they would better understand applicants' needs and motivations.

Instructors build confidence by emphasizing that students possess keen survival skills.

EXTERNAL BARRIERS

The Center for Public Advocacy Research at CUNY defined five general external barriers, some common to all groups seeking literacy services and some specific to low-income, single mothers: instability in their lives, inaccessibility of the literacy programs, inappropriate services, a lack of support services, and the unrealistic goals of participants.

Instability

A woman needs some measure of order and security in her life before she can even consider applying for a literacy program. Yet literacy policy has barely addressed issues related to the basic instability in the lives of many low-income, single mothers, according to the Center.

Homelessness or inadequate housing are the most frequently cited barriers in New York City, the Center said. A survey of homeless families requesting temporary housing in the city in October 1986 found that 86 percent were headed by women. Many of them have to move their families two, three, or even four times a month. While literacy services are not their most prominent need, homelessness almost certainly precludes participation in any training program.

Moreover, as noted in the WOW case study, the communities where low-income housing is located are often poorly served by city government. An inadequate public transportation system, for example, can be a sizeable barrier. A low-income mother often has to devote an entire day to one medical or social service appointment or grocery shopping excursion.

A precarious financial position is, by definition, a characteristic of a low-income, single mother. If a woman has the opportunity for temporary work, no

matter how low the pay, family survival may dictate that she choose the extra income over attendance at a literacy program. Many potential participants are unable to afford the extra costs of bus fare and meals, let alone books and class fees.

The literacy programs generally offer small transportation stipends, but they can do little to change the major societal problems contributing to instability in the lives of low-income women. Rather, they advocate literacy as part of a comprehensive strategy that involves easing the urban housing crisis, raising the minimum wage, eliminating pay inequities, and pressing for affirmative action in employment and training. Indeed, these five literacy programs are sponsored by organizations that seek such policy changes at the local, state, and federal levels.

All five programs do extensive outreach in the community.

Inaccessible, Inappropriate Services

The second general barrier is the inaccessibility of literacy programs to low-income, single mothers. The red tape of merely enrolling in a program may seem formidable. These women need to find programs located near their homes, jobs, or child care in order to coordinate their schedules. They need to attend classes during the day when their children are in school.

The Mary Crowley Academy method of overcoming this roadblock is to schedule classes from 8:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. and to hold them right in the housing projects where the trainees reside so that they can be home by the end of the school day. All five programs do extensive outreach in the community to make their programs seem more accessible to potential participants.

Inappropriate services are another type of barrier to participant success. Policymakers and funders often require literacy programs to achieve job placement goals. Literacy providers must respond to this mandate as well as to individual trainee needs. Some trainees may want to upgrade their basic skills to enter blue-collar jobs, while others may simply aim to prepare for further education or training leading to employment.

The program staff have developed instructional materials and activities that are relevant to the lives of trainees as a strategy for balancing these two sets of needs. The Center notes that the best literacy programs manage to incorporate a broad range of goals despite the mandate to focus on job placement.

The mandatory use of grade levels and the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) to measure participant progress also inhibits efforts to provide appropriate services adapted to individual needs. The anxiety produced by frequent testing and the trauma of receiving low test scores strains student commitment. In addition, it is questionable whether standardized tests measure real-life skills. A student may seem successful on paper by advancing a couple grade levels but still be unable to apply that learning to such practical uses as creating a home environment where literacy is a priority.

The NEW Program strongly recommends that literacy providers work together to develop a substitute for TABE that would be more relevant to students' lives. One staff member commented that since people read what they find interesting, paragraphs about soil erosion are not necessarily the best means of testing trainees'

reading comprehension. The five programs have already developed other means of measuring student progress, including instructors' observation and diagnosis.

Support Services

Women with the greatest needs – the most children or the lowest income – are unable to enroll in literacy programs because of inadequate support services – the fourth general barrier. Literacy programs often "cream" the pool of potential applicants, enrolling women who have the most resources and the fewest problems.

The need for child care is foremost in the minds of most prospective trainees. The literacy providers have responded to this barrier by directly or indirectly providing child care. Expanding Options runs its own child care center, employing three aides to care for the children of trainees. WOW employs a child care specialist to help trainees find long-term or emergency child care. WOW also offers financial assistance when a participant is unable to find subsidized child care.

Many come from home environments where education has little status.

Another vital support service is counseling and peer support to help participants handle often overwhelming personal and family problems. Many of the women are trapped in households where domestic violence is commonplace. Others have husbands or companions who oppose their efforts to improve themselves or to work outside the home, according to the MCA case study. Moreover, many come from home environments where education has little status, where parents, siblings, or friends may actually disapprove of efforts to extend the education process into adulthood.

All the programs provide staff who either directly counsel trainees or refer them to other services as a strategy for coping with these problems. In the NEW Program, a counselor conducts group and family counseling sessions and crisis intervention. She also intervenes with the courts and welfare and housing agencies on behalf of trainees.

Some of the programs facilitate peer support, a kind of self-help among trainees. MCA, for example, sets aside a period each week for Academy Rap – a time for mutual support or reflection on the week's events. Peer group support is an important strategy of the WOW literacy program, which divides students into small support groups where they work closely together and even receive group grades. Several programs enlist the support of successful students to serve as mentors for newcomers.

Other support includes financial services ranging from the simple reimbursement of bus fare to financial assistance as needed for emergencies, day care, or the transition from training to work.

Inadequate Goal-Setting

The Center's final general barrier is participants' failure to set realistic goals. Even if a trainee's ultimate goal is to find a job, she must adopt short-term goals as a means of handling the frustrations and setbacks of program participation. She also needs assistance in developing a long-range plan that will eventually lead her into employment that pays enough to support her family. Each case study program has the advantage of being part of a larger job training effort.

CONCLUSION

"The barriers are multi-tiered and varied," the Midwest Women's Center concludes. "The supportive services that would alleviate them are as important as the curriculum itself but are frequently ignored by funders and other literacy providers."

Nevertheless, a few literacy programs are striving to devise and employ strategies, techniques, learning materials, and support services to help low-income, single mothers overcome the roadblocks between them and the achievement of literacy. The five programs in the case studies have found the following to be the most effective:

Evaluators revealed a hidden barrier in the form of students' denial that barriers even exist.

- Emphasizing existing skills and knowledge to build self-esteem;
- Encouraging and reenforcing trainees in a nonthreatening environment to increase their confidence;
- Providing role models to build trainees' pride in their own identity;
- Tutoring trainees or providing one-to-one instruction to deal with special learning problems;
- Facilitating group discussions on issues of common concern;
- Recruiting throughout the community and improving the intake process to make literacy programs more accessible;
- Offering classes at times and places that are appropriate for low-income mothers;
- Balancing the funders' mandates with individual needs to ensure that the programs are appropriate for all participants;
- Developing means other than the TABE to measure student progress;
- Directly or indirectly providing child care, counseling, and other support services;
- Facilitating peer support to enable students to help each other learn or solve problems; and
- Helping students set realistic short-term and long-range goals.

The case studies conclude, however, that literacy programs cannot succeed in isolation but must be part of an overall strategy linking participants to other social services. Key among them are support services meeting the needs of women and their children and employment and training services leading to jobs with promising futures. Low-income single mothers face problems so overwhelming that they usually cannot focus on literacy as an isolated goal. As one component in a comprehensive effort, however, literacy becomes a vitally important leg of the journey to economic self-sufficiency.

NEW YORK, NEW YORK

Summary of Literacy Program Case Study

Non-Traditional Employment for Women, New York

Access for Women: Expanding Options for Teen Mothers, Brooklyn

THE COMMUNITY (contributed by Center for Public Advocacy Research, New York)

New York labor market trends do not bode well for the single mothers who head 26 percent of all families in the city. Between 1980 and 1987, 100,000 manufacturing jobs were lost. The labor market continued to expand, with 500,000 jobs added in the service sector, 130,000 in business and related professional services, and 112,000 in finance and insurance.

None of these growth areas, however, offer feasible employment opportunities for low-income, single mothers. A full-time employee in the third fastest growing industry in Manhattan – eating and drinking establishments – does not earn enough to support a family and rent an apartment in New York City.

Job openings continue to occur in older industries offering higher wages, but pervasive discrimination seriously limits opportunities for women there. For example, construction – another rapidly expanding industry – remains a predominantly white, male occupation.

Other growth sectors, such as business and related professional services and finance and industry, require high levels of skill and education. Increasingly, employers in these sectors complain that they are unable to find enough qualified applicants among graduates of New York City high schools to fill their entry-level jobs. New York Telephone found that it could hire one of 56 applicants statewide but only one of 141 in New York City.

Deficiencies in education and training are partly responsible for the high rate of poverty among women heads of household. A total of 64.2 percent of these households live in poverty in New York City. Many low-income, single mothers are not even qualified to enter GED or other training programs, due to low math and reading skills and/or limited proficiency in English, a widespread problem in this major port of entry for immigrants.

150,000 to 2 million New Yorkers need literacy services, and many programs have waiting lists.

Data on adult females in New York City indicate that 42 percent have not completed high school, and 25 percent of that total finished eight or fewer years of school. The high school drop-out rate is estimated at between 30 and 65 percent. At least half of those dropouts are women.

Growing recognition of the tremendous need for basic education has prompted an extraordinary increase in literacy services in New York City over the past few years. Several new funding streams at the state and city levels have substantially increased the resources. As a result, enrollment in the city's public literacy programs has nearly quadrupled – from 12,600 in 1984 to 45,000 in 1986. This seeming burst of growth, however, has to be viewed in the context of a drought in adult education funding and services over the previous two decades. A combination of factors, including the city's fiscal crisis in 1974, had a devastating effect on literacy service funding. Moreover, the $30 million allotted to literacy services in the New York State budget in 1987 fell far short of meeting the demand. An estimated 150,000 to 2 million New Yorkers need these services, and many literacy programs have lengthy waiting lists.

THE SITES: NON-TRADITIONAL EMPLOYMENT FOR WOMEN (NEW)

Non-Traditional Employment for Women (NEW) was founded in 1978 to serve low-income women who want to become blue-collar workers. NEW offers orientations to introduce women to nontraditional careers, counseling, pre-employment training, large-scale recruitment for trade union apprenticeships, visits to construction sites, and direct placement.

NEW currently serves almost 300 women per year, placing approximately 70 percent of them in jobs that pay an average of $10 an hour. Many former trainees, especially those in the construction industry, consider NEW headquarters to be their hiring hall.

NEW also works to influence public policy affecting women's employment issues and provides technical assistance to organizations in the Northeast region that are working to increase nontraditional job opportunities for women.

In recent years, NEW has increasingly recognized that low skill levels in reading

and math prevent program participants from finding employment. Training programs often require reading and math scores between the sixth and the ninth grade levels—beyond the capability of many NEW trainees. In 1984, NEW contracted with the New York City Community Development Agency to conduct a literacy program for women with reading scores below a grade level of 8.9.

THE LITERACY PROGRAM

NEW applicants are steered to the literacy program if their reading and math scores preclude reasonable hope for acceptance into skills training or decent jobs. The program consists of two basic education classes which run for three hours daily Monday through Thursday in a classroom at the organization's headquarters in Manhattan. The program has neither a set curriculum nor a fixed time frame, partly because applicants can enter the classes at any time throughout the year and partly because their needs and backgrounds vary so much. If their purpose is to prepare for a job-related test, they enroll for only a brief period, while if they are studying to enter a training program, they may stay longer.

Applicants can enter the classes at any time throughout the year.

Clientele

NEW clients are mostly black or Hispanic heads of household. Over 85 percent of them are on welfare. They come to NEW mainly in search of the higher wages they can get in nontraditional jobs. Students are recruited through the Literacy Assistance Center, public service announcements, the NEW Program newsletter, and flyers distributed in libraries and women's centers.

Program Principles

NEW operates on the premise that the survival skills that participants have already demonstrated by coping with their lives in New York City are applicable to the classroom learning process. Instructors help students recognize the extent of their existing knowledge and overcome negative legacies from past experiences in school. In addition, they push students to broaden their educational horizons, helping them recognize the interrelatedness of world events and sharpen their critical and analytical abilities.

Strategies and Techniques

NEW's basic education program adapts to erratic attendance and wide variations in skills, interests, objectives, and backgrounds. The instructor works to create an atmosphere that stresses informality, tolerance, mutual support, and high expectations. The program encourages students to build on their own interests, needs, and strengths. Classes are supplemented with field trips to libraries and museums, particularly places where the achievements of minorities are emphasized.

Classroom techniques include the following: free-wheeling discussions in an atmosphere of respect for individual opinions; daily writing in personal journals; dialogue writing in which students write to teachers who incorporate standard English usage in their responses; brainstorming both before and after reading and writing assignments; dictation of thoughts and experiences to a teacher or

volunteer for students not yet comfortable with written expression; reading student compositions aloud; reading minority history and literature; and considering student desires and felt needs as part of any learning activity.

Support Services

Students receive referrals to day care, food stamps, and income maintenance centers, and health, housing, and legal services. All participants are reimbursed for carfare.

Staffing

NEW's staff of 20 includes one full-time literacy instructor and a counselor who works part-time with the literacy program. The counselor helps resolve any problems interfering with student attendance and makes referrals to social service agencies as needed. In addition, the program has several volunteer tutors who receive on-the-job orientation and work one or two class sessions per week. The goal is to have one tutor available per class session.

The majority improved their scores by two to three grade levels.

Funding

NEW's FY 1988 operating budget was $847,392. The sources were Title II and III contracts under the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA), grants through the federal Carl Perkins Vocational Education Act and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, and corporate and foundation contributions. The literacy program budget for FY 1988 was $52,164, funded through the New York City Municipal Assistance Corporation and New York State Adult Education Act.

Program Results

The majority (62.5 percent) of the 56 students in the FY 1987 literacy program who took post-tests improved their scores by two to three grade levels, while 12.5 percent gained three levels or more. All but six gained at least one grade level.

Some 40 percent of these women improved their scores sufficiently to enter NEW's skill training programs. Twelve entered pre-apprenticeship classes and are now earning $10 to $18 an hour in blue-collar positions. Eleven women took NEW's building maintenance course and went on to related jobs. Two entered GED programs and received their certificates.

PLANS/RECOMMENDATIONS

NEW program staff would like to work with other providers to develop a substitute for the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE), which it considers irrelevant to students' lives and even counterproductive to the training effort. In addition, NEW staff recommend that more interesting, attractive basic education materials be developed to replace existing materials that are often patronizing or alienating to beginning adult readers. NEW is planning to improve its intake process for new students by holding an open house and by pairing new enrollees with "big sisters" who have been in the program for awhile.

ACCESS FOR WOMEN—EXPANDING OPTIONS FOR TEEN MOTHERS

The Division of Continuing Education at CUNY's New York City Technical College founded Access for Women in 1984 as an umbrella organization for three nontraditional training and employment programs for women. The first focuses on improving the math skills of women on welfare as a means of preparing them for technical training or nontraditional employment. The second consists of a series of two-hour workshops presented in secondary schools to encourage young women to consider nontraditional and technical work. The third program, Expanding Options for Teen Mothers, serves young mothers on public assistance who are interested in job training and remediation as a means of entering nontraditional work.

THE LITERACY PROGRAM

Expanding Options has given heavy weight to basic education along with vocational skill training since the program began in 1984. There are two 20-week cycles per year, each providing 200 hours of literacy training and 260 of vocational instruction. The literacy classes meet in a classroom on the NYC Technical College campus in Brooklyn, while the vocational classes have a separate laboratory/classroom in a nearby building.

The program encourages students to build on their own interests, needs, and strengths.

Clientele

Expanding Options had served 87 women, mostly from minority groups, and ranging in age from 17 to 21 as of December 1987. Most had one child, resided in Brooklyn, and had attended some high school. Fewer than one-third had earned a GED or high school diploma. The average reading level upon program entry was below grade 9.0, although the range was from 5.0 to 12.9. There was also a wide range in math scores, although the average upon program entry was just under 8.0. To recruit participants, Expanding Options works with social service agencies and makes presentations at community organizations and schools.

Program Principles

The philosophy of Expanding Options parallels that of the college's Adult Basic Education Program, which caters to the nontraditional student who has been cut off from education for some time. The approach has been modified somewhat to suit the nature of the clientele. A major goal is to broaden their general knowledge, integrating their own experiences into all learning activities.

Strategies and Techniques

When a woman enters the program, she is asked to sign the Expanding Options contract covering rules on attendance and behavior. The staff signs a contract covering the services they will provide, including classes in basic and vocational skills, assistance with problems, and job preparation.

Since skill levels in the basic education classes range from the fifth to the twelfth grade level, instruction is individualized whenever possible and assignments are made according to skill levels.

Students are repeatedly encouraged to write and read. They maintain personal journals, which the instructor checks regularly. They read and analyze newspaper articles and interpret maps and charts to expand their background in subjects such as social studies and science. To stimulate interest in reading and to provide role models, the instructor uses card games that teach about illustrious women of color.

Vocational training and basic education have been interwoven throughout the program. Practice in the mathematical skills needed for nontraditional work, for example, is included in the basic education classes, while job readiness workshops improve reading skills by requiring students to follow written instructions in the preparation of resumes and job applications.

Practice in the mathematical skills needed for nontraditional work is included.

Support Services

Three employees care for children of some enrollees in a day care center run by Expanding Options. A counselor conducts regular group counseling, family counseling, and crisis intervention, and serves as an advocate for the students, working with welfare and housing agencies and family and housing courts. She also organizes sessions in which former students and other young women working in nontraditional fields serve as mentors for current students. Job readiness workshops are an essential part of the program. A job developer places all students in jobs and/or education programs, arranges interviews and follow-ups, maintains contact with employers after placement to help resolve any difficulties, and helps students who lose their jobs.

Staffing

The staff of Expanding Options has grown in size from six in 1984 to 11 in 1987. Staff who work with the literacy program only are the part-time basic skills instructor and a part-time tutor. Other positions include project director, vocational skills instructor, lab assistant (for the vocational curriculum), job developer, counselor, three child care workers, and a secretary.

Funding

Funding sources for Expanding Options in 1987–88 included the following: the New York City Youth Bureau ($78,161), the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation ($95,000), the New York State Community Program ($38,814), and the New York City Private Industry Council ($27,017) for a total of $238,992. The cost per participant, based on an average of 18 students in each annual cycle, is $6,640. The literacy component constitutes 9 percent of the total cost, with a per student cost of $597.

Program Results

The Center for Advanced Study in Education, part of a CUNY graduate program, conducted an extensive evaluation which found that the program had dramatically improved the lives of the participants and radically expanded their career opportunities. They found that the literacy component not only shared the credit for those results but also had a major impact on measurable outcomes.

Students in discussion groups organized by the evaluators emphasized the intangible benefits of the program. However, they consistently criticized the wide range

of needs in the basic skills classroom, which they said led the low achievers to feel ashamed and other students to become bored or frustrated. Seventeen of the 20 respondents to a questionnaire had gone on to further training; 15 were working, and 13 of those said the program had been useful in helping them find jobs. Most of the respondents were those who had completed the eleventh or twelfth grades before entering the program.

An analysis of 40 paired before and after results on the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) revealed an average gain of 0.6 of a grade level in reading and 1.0 in math. Some students gained as much as 2.5 grade levels in reading and over 3.0 grade levels in math. The staff feel that the post-test scores do not accurately reflect the academic gains of the students because of the time the test is given during the training. It is administered when students are focused on getting a job and lack motivation to do well on the test; also, they have been tested on the TABE several times in other programs. Twenty-five of 87 students who entered the program without a GED or high school diploma had completed the work for one or the other, and six had gone on to college.

The program had dramatically improved the lives of the participants.

PLANS/RECOMMENDATIONS

Both program graduates and staff members recommended dividing the basic education group into at least two skill levels. They also recommended expanding recruitment efforts and improving student screening as a means of avoiding the problems caused by the flagging motivation and interest of some students. Staff members suggested a systematic review of the ranges of difficulty and interest levels of the basic education curriculum. The final recommendation was that the program make a commitment to systematic recordkeeping in order to gauge program impact and to disseminate the results to a wider audience.

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

Summary of Literacy Program Case Study

The Midwest Women's Center: Women's Apprenticeship and Nontraditional Training

THE COMMUNITY

The City of Chicago faces monumental problems in its public education system. In 60 of the 65 public high schools, students read, write, and compute below national norms. The drop-out rate for the class of 1985 was estimated at 45 percent. One-quarter of adults in the city have to cope with the problems of everyday life under the burden of functional illiteracy.

Reform of the Chicago education system has been under consideration for more than a decade. The general consensus at education summits convened in 1986 and 1987 was that the system should be decentralized and that more vehicles should be created for parental input and teacher accountability.

Chicago's employment patterns follow certain national trends. The city lost 17 percent of its jobs between 1972 and 1983, while the suburbs experienced a 26 percent gain. More recently, employment has increased in all parts of the metropolitan area, especially in the lower paying service and retail industries, although the city has not recouped its earlier loss. The unemployment rate stood at 9.5 percent in May 1987.

THE SITE

The Midwest Women's Center (MWC) is a nonprofit organization with a two-pronged mission: to provide job services for low-income women and to influence public policy affecting women's issues. After its founding in 1976, MWC established two programs—a 24-hour information and referral switchboard for women and a coalition of over 75 Illinois women's groups that monitored state legislation and lobbied for changes that would improve the status of women.

Within two years, it was clear from the switchboard logs that the most vital need of the women callers was employment assistance. MWC's focus from that time has been on training women for nontraditional employment. By 1982, employment services comprised 70 percent of MWC's total program. Currently these services include pre-employment training, a program for professional women, and an apprenticeship and nontraditional training program.

Teaching methods are based on the belief that skills are improved only after learning techniques are understood.

MWC continues, however, to provide public policy analysis, research, public education, and advocacy on women's issues through its communication and policy division. Community groups, government agencies, businesses, and other organizations rely on MWC as a resource on women's issues.

THE LITERACY PROGRAM

The MWC program with a literacy component is Women's Apprenticeship and Nontraditional Training (WANT), which prepares low-skilled women for hands-on training to enter blue-collar occupations. Originally, the program included math, blueprint reading, tool recognition, basic job readiness, and physical conditioning. Reading instruction was added to the curriculum after it became obvious that program graduates who read below the fifth grade level were unable to pass entrance exams for apprenticeships and other training.

About one-fifth of WANT program hours are devoted to math and reading classes held in a classroom at MWC's downtown location. The goal of this basic education is to give each woman the skills and self-confidence she needs to pass entrance exams for blue-collar training.

Clientele

The women who enroll in the WANT Program are mostly single heads of household who receive public assistance. Almost all are members of minority groups. Thirty percent of the FY 1987 participants were under 22; 41 percent, 22 to 30; and 28 percent, 31 to 45. Their major motivation was to find work that pays better than traditional employment for women. Sixty-four percent had never worked at a paying job or had not done so within the last five years. Recruitment is done through the Mayor's Office on Employment and Training (MET), public service announcements, ads in the public transportation system, and word of mouth.

Program Principles

16 The program goal is not necessarily immediate job placement but rather, the

creation of a system that links women to Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) and other employment and training programs. MWC stresses the importance of the sense of accomplishment that women gain by entering and completing the program; for that reason, no one is pre-tested for admission or turned away because of low skill levels. The teaching methods are based on the belief that skills are improved only after learning techniques are understood. In addition, instruction is linked to issues that affect the daily lives of students.

Strategies and Techniques

In the reading classes, students take pre- and post-tests, discuss issues relevant to them, and write short compositions reflecting their views on the topics discussed. The instructor provides reading materials on those subjects for subsequent classes. Evaluation instruments include the Career Occupational Preference System, the Inventory of Essential Skills, and instructor-designed tests.

Students are encouraged to consult each other and form support groups.

Strategies employed for the math classes include pre- and post-tests, a review of basic computations, and practice through word problems. Students check their own work and advance to the next level when they consider themselves ready. They are encouraged to consult each other and form support groups.

In addition to remedial classes, students are trained in assertiveness and dealing with sexual harassment. They learn to use the library to investigate career options. Field trips are taken to potential employers, construction sites, and the Washburne Trade School, where WANT graduates are often placed. In addition, special guests speak to the students on relevant topics including job rights, occupational safety, unions, and trades. The program runs seven hours a day, four days a week for five weeks.

Support Services

Day care, travel stipends, tools, and any special clothing needed are financed through funds from the JTPA support services and the Chicago Community Trust-Earling Fund. Staff links with the Illinois Department of Public Aid facilitate student efforts to deal with state social services.

Staffing

MWC employs two staff persons to serve the WANT Program—a counselor/coordinator and an employment development specialist. The remedial instructor, who is paid by City Colleges of Chicago, is an adult education specialist, who has developed the curriculum and materials based on her professional experience.

Funding

The total cost of the WANT Program in FY 1987 was $100,860, with 86 percent of that total coming from JTPA through the MET and the remainder from foundations and general operating funds. The cost per WANT program participant was $1,400. Since literacy represents 23 percent of total program time, its cost was estimated at $19,790 a year or $279 per student. This total does not reflect the full cost of the literacy program, since instructors' salaries are paid by the college system.

Program Results

Seventy percent of the 72 program graduates in FY 1987 had been successfully placed by December 1987—20 in jobs and 30 in further training.

The WANT trainees have mixed feelings about the literacy component of the program, however. When eight were interviewed during a class session, all said they liked the basic skills training, but six complained there was insufficient instruction in either math or reading. Their general reaction was that the program is too abbreviated and too generic in nature to address their individual needs.

Seventy percent had been successfully placed.

WANT staff attributes these inadequacies to the provisions of the MET contract, which focuses on training for specific job skills and not literacy instruction. However, most blue-collar trades require employees to have math and reading skills above the eighth grade level. Since this is often beyond the achievement level of WANT's clientele, the literacy training is regarded as vital.

PLANS/RECOMMENDATIONS

MWC staff are reviewing the curriculum with the intention of revising reading and math materials to make them more appropriate for blue-collar training. In addition, the literacy instructor has advised that the use of a proficiency test as part of the intake process would facilitate the formation of small groups divided according to skill level. This would enable the instructor to focus more on individual needs. The staff would also like to use volunteers or take-home work to extend literacy instruction outside the classroom.

DALLAS, TEXAS

Summary of Literacy Program Case Study

The STEP Foundation: Mary Crowley Academy

THE COMMUNITY

Shifting needs in the Dallas/Ft. Worth labor market have fueled a growing interest in adult literacy. Employment in construction and unskilled work has declined, due largely to a virtual standstill in several real estate sectors and the general economic slow-down from the oil price collapse. The Dallas economy is not stagnant, however, and demand is rising for more highly skilled workers to fill new retail and service sector jobs.

In the face of this expanding need, thousands of young Texans are barely able to read, write, and understand basic mathematics. Nearly half a million youths in the 16 to 24 age group were not enrolled in school and had not completed twelfth grade at the time of the 1980 census (the most recent available data). The problem is particularly acute in minority communities. (Blacks comprise almost 30 percent of the city's population, and Hispanics, over 12 percent.) The principal of one predominantly black high school said his drop-out rate was 50 to 60 percent. Functional illiteracy is widespread even among youths who do graduate.

A growing awareness of the need to raise educational standards prompted the

state legislature to pass sweeping educational reforms in 1984. More recently, the legislature established a literacy council to provide state-wide leadership for efforts to attain literacy goals and build partnerships with private sector literacy programs.

THE SITE

The STEP (Strategies to Elevate People) Foundation works to improve human service delivery to low-income people by matching corporate and community resources with community needs. STEP's major strategy is to develop teams of community leaders who meet monthly with administrators of schools, housing projects, police precincts, and agencies to help identify their needs. To find the resources to meet those needs, STEP canvasses local institutions, such as universities, corporations, clubs, and churches for volunteers willing to contribute their time and skills to the community.

More recently, the legislature established a literacy council to build partnerships with private sector literacy programs.

STEP sponsors four major programs: Madison Prep, an inner-city high school; the Pal Program that finds older volunteers to tutor and spend time with elementary school children; the Mary Crowley Academy, a literacy program for low-income women; and the Murchison Forum, an information exchange that relies on church and corporate volunteers to conduct seminars and workshops for the three other programs on such topics as nutrition and chemical dependency.

THE LITERACY PROGRAM

The Mary Crowley Academy (MCA) was founded in a Dallas housing project in 1985. By the fall of 1987, MCA was operating three academies in space donated by the Dallas Housing Authority (DHA): an old school building, the DHA administrative building auditorium, and an apartment that had been converted to a library/playroom.

MCA operates in partnership with El Centro Community College, which provides the academies with instructors and a developmental education curriculum. There are three program levels. Applicants who score below a grade level of 6.0 on El Centro's developmental education assessment test are first enrolled in the Adult Basic Education Program of the Dallas School District. Those who score above that level are enrolled directly in one of the academies. Students must spend at least one semester at MCA before "graduating" to the third program level, which is taught at El Centro. The length of training depends on individual progress, but most students need two semesters to complete one level.

Clientele

The average enrollee is a low-income, single mother, age 35, with three or four children. She lacks either a high school diploma or the basic skills necessary to obtain a GED or to enroll in college or job training. When the program started, MCA recruited participants door-to-door. More recently, the program has been advertised through public service announcements, word of mouth, and flyers distributed at churches, women's clinics, and grocery stores.

Program Principles

The Mary Crowley curriculum is based on the belief that literacy is not just the simple knowledge of reading, writing, and mathematics. Rather, a literate individual is one who takes an educated approach to life, who can bring a broad background of knowledge to bear on problem solving and decision making. MCA stresses the emotional, spiritual, and physical well-being of its students, as well as their intellectual development.

Strategies and Techniques

The STEP strategy of drawing on community resources is a key feature that MCA has adapted to its own needs. A group of volunteers – the Family Share Team – is recruited from the community and assigned to each MCA student to function as her extended family. The team meets with its student once a month to offer support and problem-solving assistance. Each team member takes the lead in one aspect of the student's life: education, finances, social growth, spiritual growth, or family situations. During the month, they keep in touch with her by telephone and through personal visits.

They often credit their Family Support Teams with much of their success in the program.

This is a form of support that Mary Crowley students have rarely encountered in their lives. Many come from homes where education receives low priority. They often credit their Family Support Teams with much of their success in the program.

MCA's developmental education classes meet on Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday mornings, with math instruction from 8:30 to 9:50, reading from 10:00 to 11:20, and writing from 11:30 to 12:50 p.m.

In keeping with its holistic philosophy of education, MCA devotes Wednesdays to enrichment activities. Special guests from the Murchison Forum visit the academies to speak on topics such as health, travel, and careers. During a read-for-pleasure period, poetry, drama, humor, and magazine articles are introduced. Other events include a sex education class and a half-hour chapel service. "Academy Rap" is a time set aside for discussion of the week's events, mutual support, or homework. To develop community awareness, field trips are taken on Fridays to the library, museums, the theater, and other sites.

Each student's progress is tracked on a daily basis. The student must score at least 75 on a skill mastery test given at the end of each chapter before she can move on in the text. Intermediate competency exams are given at the end of the semester to ensure that the student is ready to progress to the next level of developmental studies.

Support Services

The Family Share Teams described above constitute MCA's major support service. In addition, MCA provides bus fare and referrals to child care, counseling, and health and other services.

Staffing

The STEP Foundation has a staff of six – an executive director, an administrative assistant, and four program directors including the MCA program director, who

supervises all three program levels. In addition, each academy has an on-site director selected from MCA graduates enrolled at the college. Trained informally in Mary Crowley management, the directors handle daily activities including recruitment, new student testing, daily attendance, and field trip planning. The academic instructors are retired Dallas public school teachers employed by El Centro through the Dallas County Community College District.

Funding

Because MCA and STEP funds are commingled, no exact figures could be reported for MCA at the time the case study was written. The STEP executive director estimated that funds for the first two years of MCA operation totaled $80,583, including $54,088 for personnel. In-kind and financial contributions from churches, corporations, and the community have substantially supplemented the budget. For example, Dallas businesswoman and philanthropist, the late Mary Crowley, donated the initial operating funds, and a number of scholarships have been contributed through mail solicitations.

"Academy Rap" is a time set aside for discussion of the week's events.

Program Results

In a survey distributed in November 1987, MCA students made comments indicating that program participation had a positive impact on their self-image. MCA enrollment records reveal that of 127 students who entered the academy between fall 1985 and fall 1987, 44 are now at El Centro and 25 dropped out of the program, including four who took full-time employment, two who entered other programs, and 18 who left primarily for reasons relating to finances or child care. The goal for each MCA student is long-range self-sufficiency, rather than immediate job placement, and there are no time limits on achieving that goal.

PLANS/RECOMMENDATIONS

MCA is developing a five-year plan based on the case study as part of an effort to formalize its planning process. The first formal budget will be developed for the 1988–89 school year. The separation of the STEP and MCA accounts in 1988 will facilitate financial accounting. Another goal for 1988 is to establish an advisory board to coordinate future directions.

The long-range MCA plan is to establish academies in each of the eight Dallas housing projects where a majority of the tenants are low-income, single mothers.

The STEP strategies that have contributed to the success of the Mary Crowley Academy have been implemented in a number of other cities. Trainees from Washington, DC; Richmond, VA; Norfolk, VA; Nashville, TN; and Ft. Worth, TX will serve internships of 12 to 15 months in Dallas beginning in summer 1988 to observe MCA and other STEP Foundation programs.

WASHINGTON, DC

Summary of Literacy Program Case Study

Wider Opportunities for Women, Inc.

THE COMMUNITY

Washington, DC is a city of stark contrasts. The nation's capital has the worst literacy rate in the country alongside the best educated citizenry. More than 12 percent of the population lives in poverty, yet the per capita income is the highest in the country.

The disparities in education and income levels have parallels in the labor market. Employment is burgeoning in the suburbs while unemployment in the city exceeds the national average (7.5 percent for whites, 10.4 percent for blacks). Yet the suburbs face a serious labor shortage, due to a public transportation system with costly fares, which operates on a white-collar schedule, and fails to adequately link low-income communities with areas of employment growth.

The federal government is the largest employer, providing some 350,000 jobs, a third of them located in the city. Services and the wholesale/retail trade are the fastest growing industries. Most of the service jobs are in tourism, business, law, and health care. Almost one-third of DC area women workers are employed in the services, the majority concentrated in the lower-paid areas that have traditionally been open to women – sales, education, health, and secretarial or clerical work.

THE SITE

Wider Opportunities for Women, Inc. (WOW) is a nonprofit organization that works to achieve economic independence and equal employment opportunity for women. Founded in 1964 as an employment/information service for professional women, it soon expanded its services to include clients from other backgrounds. In 1970, WOW shifted priorities to focus on training for economically and educationally disadvantaged women. Since then, WOW has trained women to enter nontraditional jobs.

For more than a decade, WOW has also operated the Women's Work Force Network of community-based women's employment programs. Through the network, WOW provides training and technical assistance and fosters information sharing among the 400 members.

A child care specialist helps make long-term and emergency child care arrangements.

Systemic change in employment policies, programs, and practices is the ultimate goal of Wider Opportunities for Women. The WOW public policy unit focuses advocacy efforts on welfare reform, vocational education, pay equity, the Job Training Partnership Act, and legislation addressing literacy.

THE LITERACY PROGRAM

As the math and language skills of trainees declined in recent years, WOW's training programs increasingly emphasized basic education. In the current program – Single Parent Employability and Educational Development (SPEED) – basic education has been given equal priority with job skill training and career development. Established in 1982, SPEED is part of a long-range study of job training for low-income mothers sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation in four U.S. cities.

SPEED has two training models – Electro-Mechanical training (EM) and Basic Employability Skill Training (BEST). Another model – Basic Education and Training for Tomorrow's Employment (BETTE) – operated in 1987 with funding from the DC Department of Employment Services.

All three models provide training in job skills, career development, job search and retention, and basic education, as well as a three- or four-week internship. The emphasis is somewhat different for each model, however. EM offers training for women who want to acquire technical skills for nontraditional work, and BEST attracts women who are more interested in furthering their education and/or obtaining conventional jobs.

The training classes are conducted at WOW headquarters in the downtown business district. The facilities include classrooms, a learning library, a computer training laboratory, and staff offices.

Clientele

Virtually all SPEED Program participants are black, and 60 percent fall between the ages of 25 and 36. To qualify for the program, a woman must have at least one dependent child and be 18 years of age or older. The average grade levels of incoming participants in 1986–87 were 7.7 in reading, 8.2 in spelling,

and 6.8 in math. The EM participants had the highest grade levels, and the BETTE participants had the lowest. BETTE participants were low-income, unemployed DC residents who had attained at least the fifth grade level in basic skills. Over one-third of them had neither a high school diploma nor a GED.

Students are recruited through public service announcements on WOW's radio program and other programs, presentations at job fairs and street festivals, newspaper announcements, and flyers distributed in community agencies.

Program Principles

The literacy component of these programs is built on principles developed from years of experience in training. First, the program must be short in duration and lead to a practical goal that is easily identified with the training. Second, the remediation process must be tailored to the needs of each student and modified as her skill levels rise. Third, the program must involve some intellectual challenge. And last, the learning environment must be nonthreatening and supportive of individual goals.

Each group has a mixture of trainees with different age and skill levels as a means of stimulating motivation.

Strategies and Techniques

The key component of WOW's basic skill instruction is the Individualized Education Prescription (IEP) developed for each student. The IEP describes her basic educational skill levels and "prescribes" a plan for remediation – the process whereby students receive assistance in identifying and working on their learning weaknesses. Individual student-teacher conferences are held to discuss test results and the IEP, providing students with the opportunity to help plan their own remediation and an understanding of their strengths and deficiencies. Student and instructor negotiate a remediation schedule and meet periodically to update the IEP.

Peer group support is another important strategy. Students form small support groups, working closely with each other and receiving group grades. Each group has a mixture of trainees with different age and skill levels as a means of stimulating motivation.

All potential participants take the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) before enrollment. Those scoring below the fifth grade level are referred to other programs. If they score between the fifth and the seventh grade levels on reading, spelling, and math, they are eligible for remediation. A number of other evaluation devices are also used, including oral reading exams, the Differential Aptitude Test, and staff observation and diagnosis.

Instruction in computer basics was introduced to the curriculum in 1984. A computer-assisted learning program that encourages individual study was installed more recently.

At the end of the program, each student takes a post-TABE and meets her instructors for a final conference to review skill masteries and areas needing additional work and to discuss the possibility of further remediation.

Support Services

WOW considers child care to be the most vital support service. A WOW child

care specialist helps trainees make long-term and emergency child care arrangements. Trainees can receive financial assistance if they are unable to find subsidized child care or if they need money for transportation, emergencies, or the transition from training to work. In addition, counseling or appropriate referrals are provided for participants with personal problems or difficulties with the program. Other services include individual tutoring; instruction in life skills, career planning and parenting; and job placement.

Staffing

The basic education program staff includes one or two (depending on current funding levels) full-time adult basic education instructors, a half-time math instructor, a full-time coordinator of instruction, a part-time educational services manager, and 10 volunteer tutors.

Students are recruited through public service announcements on WOW's radio program.

Funding

WOW training programs are supported by a variety of public and private funders. In 1987, contributors to SPEED included the Rockefeller Foundation ($350,000), the DC Department of Employment Services ($65,000), and the U.S. Labor Department's Women's Bureau ($64,000). The DC Department of Employment Services also gave $90,000 to the BETTE Program, which ended in October 1987. The cost of the literacy program was $133,480, including $108,760 in labor costs. The cost per participant was $513.38.

Program Results

At the end of training, five criteria are used to determine whether students have achieved program goals: positive evaluations from instructors, job counselors, and the internship supervisor; satisfactory completion of a comprehensive test and an appraisal of employability skills; a satisfactory rating on all skills on a skill acquisition chart; a better score on the post-TABE than on the pre-TABE; and placement in a job or further training.

TABE grade level improvements also measure program success. BETTE trainees achieved average improvements of 2.49 in reading, 1.98 in math, and 1.26 in spelling.

Program results are also assessed through questionnaires and interviews. In a WOW survey of trainees, many reported significant improvements in their goals and life directions resulting from their experiences in the program.

PLANS/RECOMMENDATIONS

WOW plans to expand some aspects of its training program and modify others. The remediation efforts will be strengthened, especially the computer-assisted learning. The size of the training groups will be decreased, and more flexible program schedules will be designed.

Other plans include the establishment of a regular pre-apprenticeship program with one or more local industries and the addition of courses in maintenance and repair and physical conditioning. WOW intends to add more employment-related workshops for women who are job hunting or changing careers.